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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Dec. 1, 2005

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Cassis: Controlling school health care costs puts more dollars in classroom

State Sen. Nancy Cassis today joined the Senate in approving legislation that gives school districts more flexibility and options for employee health care plans. Senate Bills 895-898 allow school districts to voluntarily negotiate self-insured health insurance pools and offer savings to cash-strapped districts that can benefit from increased competition between health-care providers.

“Many school districts face rising employee health care costs, keeping education dollars from reaching the classroom where they are needed,” said Cassis, R-Novi, vice chair of the Senate Education Committee. “This legislation gives districts voluntary options to control these costs.”

The package contains safeguards to protect patients’ privacy, retains collective bargaining provisions and has the potential to curb one of the fastest-growing costs school districts face. According to a study released by the Hay Group, a benefits consulting firm, the legislation will save school districts from \$150 million to \$230 million in the first three years.

“The superintendents of the Huron Valley, Northville, Novi, South Lyon, Walled Lake and West Bloomfield school districts as well as the Oakland Intermediate School District and the Tri-County Alliance for Public Education have communicated their support for these measures to me,” Cassis said. “As a former educator, I understand that teachers are concerned about keeping their health benefits. What is great about this approach is that it is entirely voluntary, allowing school districts and their employees to take the best plan for the best price.”

The bill now goes to the House of Representatives.

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